

I.

The Man to be Wrought upon.

“Behold, I will pour out My Spirit unto you, I will make known My Words unto you.”—*Prov. i. 23.*



The discussion so far has been confined to the Holy Spirit's work in the Church as a *whole*. We now consider His work in individual *persons*.

There is a distinction between the Church as a whole and its individual members. There is a *Body* of Christ, and there are *members* which constitute a part of that Body. And the character of the Holy Spirit's work in the one is necessarily different from that of the other.

The Church, born of divine pleasure, is complete in the eternal counsel, and sovereign choice has prepared all its course.

The same God who has numbered the hairs of our head has also numbered the members of Christ's Body. As every natural birth is foreordained, so is every Christian birth in the Church divinely predestined.

The origin and awakening of eternal life are from above; not from the creature, but from the Creator, and are rooted in His free and sovereign choice. And it remains not merely a choice, but is followed by a divine *act* equally decisive that enforces and realizes that choice.

That is God's spiritual *omnipotence*. He is not as a man who experiments, but He is God who, never forsaking the work of His hands, is persistent and irresistible in the doing of all His pleasure. Hence His counsel becomes history; and the Church, whose form is outlined in that counsel, must in the course of ages be born, increase, and perfect itself according to that counsel; and since that counsel is indestructible the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church. This is the ground of the security and consolation of the saints. They have no other ground of trust. From the fact that God is God, and that therefore His pleasure shall stand, they draw the sure conviction with which they prophesy against all that is visible and phenomenal.



In the work of grace, there is no trace of chance or fatalism; God has determined not only the final issue, leaving the way by which it is to be attained undecided, but in His counsel He has prepared every means to realize His choice. And in that counsel ways disclose themselves which human eye can not trace nor fathom. The divine omnipotence adapts itself to the nature of the creature. It causes the cedars of Lebanon to grow, and the bulls of Bashan to increase; but it feeds and strengthens each according to its nature. The cedar eats no grass, and the ox does not burrow in the ground for food.

The divine ordinance requires that by its roots the tree shall absorb the juices from the ground, and that by the mouth the ox shall take his food and convert it into blood. And He honors His own ordinance by providing food in the soil for the one, and grass in the field for the other.

The same principle prevails in the Kingdom of Grace. To man as a subject of that Kingdom, and of the moral world belonging to it, God has given another organism than to the ox, cedar, wind, or stream. The movements of the latter are purely mechanical; from the steep mountain the stream *must* fall. In a different way He acts upon ox and tree; and in still another way upon man. In the human body chemical forces work mechanically, and other forces like those in the ox and cedar. And besides these there are in man moral forces which God operates also *according to their nature*.

Upon this ground our fathers rejected as unworthy of God the fanatical view that in the work of grace man is a stock or block; not because it attributes something to man, but because it represents God as denying His own work and ordinance. Creating an ox or a tree or stone each different from the other, giving each a nature of its own, it follows that He can not violate this, but must adapt Himself to it. Hence all His spiritual operations are subject to the divinely ordained dispositions in man as a spiritual being; and this feature makes the work of grace exceedingly beautiful, glorious, and adorable.

For let us not deceive ourselves and speak any longer of a glorious work of grace if the omnipotent God treats man mechanically, as a stock or block. Then there is no mystery for angels to look into, but an immediate work of omnipotence breaking down and creating anew. To admire the work of grace we should take it as it is *revealed, i.e.*, as a complicated, unsearchable work by which, violating nothing, God adapts Himself to the delicate and manifold needs of man's spiritual being; and reveals His divine omnipotence in the victory over the endless and gigantic obstacles which human nature puts in His way.

Even the heart of God thirsts after love. His entire counsel may be reduced to one thought, viz., that in the end of the ages He may have a Church which shall understand His love and return it. But love can not be ordered, neither can it be forced in an unspiritual way. It can not be poured out in a man's heart mechanically. To be warm, refreshing, and satisfying, love must be quickened, cultivated, and cherished. Hence God does not instil an ounce of love into His people's hearts, in consequence of which they love Him, but He exhibits love to such an extent that He, who was from the beginning with God and was God, in unfathomable love dies for men on the cross.

This would have been superfluous if man were a stock or block. Then God would only have had to create love in his heart, and men would have loved Him from sheer necessity, as a stove emits heat when the fire is lighted. But the love so warmly portrayed in Scripture is not superfluous, when God deals with spiritual creatures spiritually. Then the cross of Christ is a manifestation of divine love far surpassing all human conceptions; hence exercising such irresistible power upon all God's elect.

And that which is preeminently true and apparent in *love* is equally true of every part of the work of grace—in all its stages. In it God never denies Himself, nor the ordinance and plan after which man was created. Hence it is its glory that, while on the one hand God



granted man the strongest means of resistance, on the other He overcame that resistance in a divine and kingly way by the omnipotence of redeeming grace.

When the apostle testifies, “We pray you in Christ’s stead, *as tho God did beseech you by us*, be ye reconciled to God,” (2 Cor. v. 20) he reveals such a depth of the mystery of love that finally the relations are literally reversed, and the holy God beseeches His rebellious creature, who instead should cry to Him for mercy.

Tradition speaks of the fascination of mysterious beings exerted upon travelers and mariners so irresistibly that the latter cast themselves willingly and yet *against* their will into destruction. In love’s revelation this tradition in a reversed and holy manner has become a reality. Here also is an almighty power of fascination, in the end irresistible to the condemned sinner; but allowing himself to be drawn unwillingly and yet willingly, eternal pity draws him not *into* destruction, but *out of it*.

However, the wonderful workings of love can scarcely be analyzed. Lovers never know who has attracted and who has been attracted, nor how in the struggle of the affections love performed its drawings. Love’s being is too mysterious to reveal its various workings and how they succeed one another. And this applies in far greater measure to the love of God. Every saint knows by experience that at last it became irresistible, and prevailed. But how the victory was achieved can not be told. This divine work comes to us from such infinite heights and depths, it affects us so mysteriously, and in the beginning there was such utter lack of spiritual light that one can scarcely more than stammer of these things. Who comprehends the mystery of the natural birth? Who had knowledge when he was being curiously embroidered in the lowest parts of the earth? And if this took place without our consciousness, how can we understand our spiritual birth? Indeed, subjectively, *i.e.*, depending upon our own experience, we know absolutely nothing of it; and all that ever was or can be said about it is taken exclusively from Scripture. It has pleased the Lord to lift only a corner of the veil covering this mystery—no more than the Holy Spirit deemed necessary for the support of our faith, for the glory of God and the benefit of others in the hour of their spiritual birth.

Wherefore in this series of articles we will try only to systematize and explain what God has revealed for the spiritual direction of His children.

Nothing is further from our minds than to exercise ourselves in things too high for us, or to penetrate into mysteries hid from our view. Where Scripture stops we shall stop; to the difficulties left unexplained, we shall not add what must be only the result of human folly. But where Scripture proclaims unmistakably Jehovah’s sovereign power in the work of grace, there neither the criticism nor the mockery of men will prevent us from demanding absolute submission to the divine sovereignty and giving glory to His Name.



II.

The Work of Grace a Unit.

“Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us.”— *Rom. v. 5.*



The final end of all God's ways is that He may be all in all. He can not cease from working until He has entered the souls of individual men. He thirsts after the creature's love. In man's love for God He desires to see the virtues of His own love glorified. And love must spring from man's personal being, which has its seat in the heart.

The work of grace exhibited in the eternal counsel can never be sufficiently praised. From Paradise to Patmos, revealed to prophets and apostles, it is transcendently rich and glorious. Prepared in Immanuel, who ascended on high, who has received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them, it exceeds the praise of men and angels. And yet its highest glory and majesty appear only when, overcoming the rebellious, operating in the soul, it causes its light so to shine that men, seeing it, glorify the Father which is in heaven.

Hence the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the crowning event of all the great events of salvation, because it reveals *subjectively, i.e.* in individual persons, the grace revealed hitherto objectively.

Assuredly in the days of the Old Covenant saving grace wrought in individuals, but it always bore a preliminary and special character. Old-Covenant believers “received not the promise, that they without us should not be made perfect.” (*Heb. xi. 39, 40*) And the dispensation of personal salvation, in its normal character, began only when, the work of reconciliation being finished, Immanuel risen, the other Comforter had come inwardly to enrich the members of the Body of Christ.

Hence the purpose of the Triune God steadily urges to this glorious consummation. The divine compassion can not cease from working so long as the work of saving the individual soul is not begun. In all the preparatory work God aims persistently at His elect; not only after the fall, but even before creation, His wisdom rejoiced in His earthly world, and “His delights were with the sons of men.” (*Prov. viii. 31*) From eternity He foreknows all in whom His glorious light shall once be kindled. They are no strangers to Him, discovered only after the lapse of ages, upon examination either to be passed by as unprofitable, or to be wrought upon as proper and useful subjects, according to their respective merits; no, our faithful Covenant God never stands as a stranger before any of His creatures. He created them all and ordained how they should be created; they are not first created, then ordained; but ordained, then created. Even then the creature is not independent of the Lord, but *before* there is a word upon his tongue He knoweth it altogether; not by information of what already existed, but by divine knowledge of what was to come. Even the relations of cause and effect

